

PRÁCTICAL ACTION RESEARCH *for Change*

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Foreword by Robin Fogarty

Chapter 9

Prominent Researchers

There is a striking kinship between Kurt Lewin and the work of John Dewey. Both agree that democracy must be learned anew in each generation and that it is a far more difficult form of social structure to attain and maintain than is autocracy.

—Gordon Allport

The relationship between researchers and the researched has focused upon the benefit to the researcher and has treated the needs of people in the schools more or less as a nuisance . . . Quite aside from the morality of that older relationship, it has crippled efforts to make research useful to educators.

—Philip Runkel

Allport, the social psychologist extraordinaire, pointed to Dewey's and Lewin's overlap of values in his foreword to Lewin's (1948) *Resolving Social Conflicts*, while years later my colleague, Phil Runkel (1978), reminds us that the conflict between action research and traditional social science dies hard.

Since Lewin's death in 1947, social scientists who publish about action research have been few and far between. The lion's share of modern Lewineans, particularly those with doctorates in psychology, publish some form of traditional social-science research. Even such action-oriented reformers as Warren Bennis, Lee Bradford, Kenneth Clark, Jack French, Jack Gibb, and Ron Lippitt published field studies primarily in traditional scholarly journals.

Nevertheless, following the ideological leadership of Dewey, Follett, and Lewin, a handful of social scientists and educators have contrib-

uted significantly to literature on action research and, more recently, to an emerging literature on teacher research. However, this small number of action researchers is dwarfed by the hundreds of traditional Lewineans, such as Morton Deutsch, Leon Festinger, Harold Kelly, Stanley Milgram, Stan Schachter, and John Thibault, who during the past fifty years have filled scholarly journals with creative research and illuminating theory.

John Dewey, Mary Parker Follett, and Kurt Lewin

Before discussing the contributions of action researchers, a few more words are in order about the conceptual hopes and democratic values of Dewey, Follett, and Lewin.

John Dewey

A high school and a university teacher, John Dewey (1859–1952) became America's best-known and most prolific educational philosopher. He considered democracy to be a quality of living together—a mode of community life—rather than only a form of government.

At the turn of the century, when members of diverse ethnic groups were coming together in the neighborhoods of Chicago and New York, Dewey conceptualized how to foster their cohesion and togetherness. He viewed public schooling, in particular, as a primary means for achieving social integration. Dewey argued that schooling should embody democracy in action, thereby serving as a microcosm and mirror of the larger democratic community.

Through democratic participation in classrooms, Dewey believed that students would learn concepts, values, and skills of cooperative living. He thought that group projects in which students cooperate to reflect on and study social issues or community problems would offer an important means for achieving a more democratic community.

Dewey's ideas about group projects resembled teacher-student and student-student cooperative action research. He argued, too, that teachers and administrators should work together democratically, not only because it is a moral way to run a school, but also because students could observe adults modeling democratic norms and procedures.

Mary Parker Follett

An author of four books and a popular lecturer on workplace democracy, Mary Parker Follett (1868–1933) sought the use of scientific methods to transform worker-manager conflict into creative solutions to enhance productivity. Like Dewey, she considered democracy as modes of daily social interaction rather than just a distant form of government. She believed that conflict in industrial organizations is natural and inevitable and argued that intergroup conflict can be harnessed to increase organizational effectiveness. She told audiences, "All polishing is done by friction" (Follett 1940, p.31). Follett argued that

workers and managers should bring their differences to joint conferences, where they could use scientific methods to resolve conflicts together.

Follett conceptualized four critical steps for workers and managers to achieve a creative and harmonious relationship. The key concept for her was "coordination." First is coordination by virtue of frequent face-to-face meetings of responsible parties. Second is coordination of participants to specify and define problems they have in common. Third is coordination of participants studying all aspects of problems together. Fourth is coordination of continual intergroup problem solving (Follett 1940). Note the similarity between Follett's ideas about coordination and the action-research steps.

Kurt Lewin

Kurt Lewin (1890–1947) is the father of action research. He emigrated from Germany in 1933 because, as a Jew, he could not qualify for a tenured professorship at the University of Berlin. The discrimination and prejudice he observed throughout his early years in Central Europe, along with the frightening rise of Nazism, motivated him to look for ways that social science could help strengthen democracy and reduce prejudice. Lewin saw action research as a means to democracy; indeed, at times Lewin thought of action research and democratic participation as synonymous.

During his all-too-brief fourteen years in the United States, he attracted dozens of outstanding students and coworkers to collaborate with him at Cornell, in Iowa, and at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Although he sought to integrate traditional science with action research, his collaborators spent most of their time and effort publishing traditional research in lieu of action research. It is surmised that the reason was (and still is) that promotion to full professor requires publication of traditional research in scholarly journals.

Even Lewin published his research primarily in scholarly journals. A notable exception was the book *Resolving Social Conflicts* (1948), which was edited by his wife, Gertrud Weiss Lewin, one

year after his death. That collection of Lewin's work includes a few examples of his efforts at community-based action research during the years of World War II.

Lewin was dedicated and hardworking. He had time for every collaborator and was enormously influential in interpersonal exchanges. Many of his students and coworkers undoubtedly carried out a good deal of unpublished action research as consultants and social activists. Lewin truly believed in the value of human interdependence and sought to build bridges between practitioners and scientists.

Alice Miel and Stephen Corey

Alice Miel and Stephen Corey, two pioneers in linking action research to school improvement, both worked at the Horace-Mann-Lincoln Institute of School Experimentation at Columbia University, New York. Miel applied action research to classroom improvement, while Corey focused more on cooperative action research in schools and throughout districts.

Alice Miel

From 1944 to 1950, Alice Miel cooperated with Ken Benne (who worked with Lewin), Chandas Reid, and Alice Stewart in the Horace-Mann-Lincoln Institute of School Experimentation at Columbia University in New York. They used action-research methods to help elementary school teachers use cooperative-learning procedures in their classrooms. Miel and her associates consulted with over 100 teachers nationwide in one of the largest efforts ever to disseminate action-research methods.

The project's teachers planned cooperative-learning activities in small collegial groups for their students. They tried particular cooperative procedures in their own classes, collected systematic data about the processes and their effects, modified the cooperative procedures when needed, and collected additional data to track results. Miel and her associates taught teachers to

collect data in several ways and from several sources. The teachers amassed introspective data by keeping reflective journals about their teaching. They also collected perceptual and attitudinal data from their students, and their colleagues collected data on classroom behaviors of students during cooperative learning. The teachers also collected data from parents about their reactions to cooperative-learning activities.

Miel and her associates helped teachers reflect on the data, arranged for small groups of teachers to discuss the data, and facilitated group problem solving about ways to improve cooperative-learning activities. As the project unfolded, Miel and her associates taught teachers how to find scientific evidence for student growth in helpfulness, friendliness, independence, responsibility, and group skills. They also helped teachers collect data on students' cognitive growth and academic achievement in different curriculum domains. The project helped establish action research and cooperative learning as core parts of curriculum for graduate students at the Teachers College at Columbia (Miel et al. 1952).

Stephen Corey

Partly because of Miel's innovative efforts, Stephen Corey, then executive director of the Horace-Mann-Lincoln Institute of School Experimentation, organized three national conferences on action research to improve school practices. At one of those meetings, a group of school administrators from Denver, Colorado, took special interest in action research and subsequently cooperated with Corey and the staff of the institute to conceptualize action research from the point of view of school administration.

The Denver group distinguished between empirical action research and the more typical casual inquiry, which group members thought most school administrators do every day. Using empirical action research, data are systematically sought, recorded, and interpreted to discover any problems (as in responsive action research) and to learn the effect of using new procedures to solve existing problems (as in proactive action research).

The Denver group wanted to answer whether a particular action truly did result in desirable consequences. Group members labeled their question the action hypothesis. An action hypothesis of interest to high school principals in the Denver group was that high school curriculum committees comprising volunteers will be more productive than curriculum committees comprising appointees. The group also wished to collect data on undesirable outcomes that might accompany the expected results. The principals deliberately searched for dysfunctional outcomes, such as colleagues feeling alienated from an elite group of volunteers. Corey's group, like Miel's teachers, sought multiple-method data from multiple sources.

After eight years of cooperative action-research projects throughout the United States, Corey (1953) came up with six conditions that foster effective school-based action research. His conditions are as true today as they were fifty years ago. See Figure 9.1 for Corey's Six Conditions that Foster Effective School-Based Action Research.

Ron Lippitt

Ron Lippitt, Lewin's student who did the most to nurture the development of action research, began working with Lewin in 1936. Although Lippitt was just twenty-four when he joined Lewin in Iowa City, he had already spent a year

studying with Jean Piaget in Geneva, Switzerland. Lewin, Lippitt, and White finished the famous democratic, autocratic, laissez-faire leadership study of boys' clubs in 1939. With the start of World War II, Lewin's and Lippitt's research efforts turned to the societal needs and practical problems of that era.

During the 1950s, Lippitt taught planned change in the Research Center on Group Dynamics at the University of Michigan. In 1958, with students Jeanne Eisenstadt Watson and Bruce Westley, Lippitt wrote *The Dynamics of Planned Change* (1958). Although the term action research seldom appears, the book does outline the essential steps of responsive action research. Lippitt and his coauthors describe seven phases of planned change. Figure 9.2 outlines the Seven Phases of Planned Change.

Paulo Freire

Paulo Freire, an educational reformer, developed a radically innovative strategy of adult learning and social change during the 1960s in Brazil and in Chile. Freire likened traditional education to a bank where teachers deposit knowledge into students who serve as depositories. The proper role of a student is to receive, to file, to store, and, when called upon, to issue the deposits (Freire 1970).

Corey's Six Conditions that Foster Effective School-Based Action Research

1. **Openness to Weakness:** Administrators and staff members speak honestly to one another about those parts of the school program that need improvement.
2. **Chances for Creativity:** Administrators provide staff members with opportunities to brainstorm and analyze inventive ideas about alternative future practices.
3. **Support for Trial and Error:** Administrators provide staff members with support, resources, and materials to initiate and test alternative practices.
4. **Cooperative Staff Relations:** Administrators and staff members share norms and skills that support cooperative problem solving about their own group efforts.
5. **Value Data Collection:** Administrators and staff members believe they should go beyond casual inquiry to collect systematic data about their processes and school outcomes.
6. **Time for Improvement:** Administrators create ways to release staff members from regular duties to become engaged in professional reflection, action research, and staff problem solving.

Figure 9.1

Seven Phases of Planned Change

- Phase 1: An individual or team pinpoints a need for change. Although the need for change might emanate from frustration, the individual or team strives to define the need as a current situation falling short of a target or ideal state.
- Phase 2: Systematic data are collected about the current situation and the participants' wishes for the ideal state. The data come from multiple sources.
- Phase 3: The data are used to create a diagnosis of the situation. This phase can include the Force-Field Analysis (see chapter 1), which Lewin conceptualized as part of his field theory.
- Phase 4: After the diagnosis, a plan is made to change the current situation and move toward the ideal state. This phase is the heart of planned change; it must be guided by data for it to be action research.
- Phase 5: The plans of phase 4 are converted into actual change efforts—these efforts are the actions of action research.
- Phase 6: The actions are assessed. (Are the change efforts working?) Systematic data are collected.
- Phase 7: The best parts of the actions are institutionalized.

Figure 9.2

While teaching illiterate adults to read and to feel empowered to change their impoverished lives, Freire thought of teaching and learning as a mutually interactive exchange—learners teach and learn at the same time. Adult development occurs in groups. The group process of learning together is organized around creative problem solving, during which participants reflect on their situations. At the same time, participants are learning to read. The psychological keys to learning to read are reflection about oneself, discussion about others' reflections, and cooperation with peers to change things for the better. Reading, reflecting, feeling empowered, and cooperating to solve problems cannot be separated.

Just as professional reflection is linked to action research, self-reflection is linked to actively improving one's own situation. Although Freire writes very little about systematic data collections in his pedagogical strategy, his stress on interpersonal dialogue assumes that it is through open and honest exchanges of personal information—or as we have called it, probing conversation—that adult learners grow. People grow intellectually and emotionally when they grapple with the thoughts, feelings, and skills of others. In that sense, Freire views dialogue as exchanges of data to help participants improve their own lives.

Chris Argyris and Donald Schön

Chris Argyris and Donald Schön are both action scientists, a variation of action researchers. Action scientists study what social-psychological dynamics are present in a concrete social situation. They review published research that might shed light on that particular situation, plan strategies to change the status quo, intervene to improve the status quo, evaluate how improvements unfold and interrelate, plan revised strategies and interventions, and then continually plan, intervene, and evaluate. As these cycles of action and research play out, action scientists strive to create general principles and hypotheses that serve as building blocks of scientific theories of planned social change.

Chris Argyris

Chris Argyris created action science with Harvard University students during the seventies and early eighties. In action science, a bundle of interrelated intellectual and behavioral events produce 1) concrete data for local action, problem solving, and improvement and 2) general principles for scientific theories of planned change. Like Lewin, Argyris hoped to build bridges between practical action researchers and theoretical social scientists (Argyris, Putnam, and Smith 1985).

Many traditional social scientists believe that their knowledge contributes to the work of action researchers; however, they often do not believe that knowledge gleaned from local action research contributes to development of more general theory. Argyris, like Lewin, does not agree. Argyris argues that traditional social scientists can learn a great deal by studying how action researchers go about changing things. He offers Lewin's Force-Field Analysis (see chapter 1) as a case in point.

Donald Schön

Donald Schön (1983 and 1987), Argyris's colleague at Harvard, contributed to our understanding of how professional reflection can facilitate improved practice. Schön sees reflective practice engaging teachers, administrators, or students in cycles of introspection and action, based on their experiences in the classroom and in the school. During reflection, according to Schön, mature professionals think critically about their plans, decisions, actions, and effects on others to improve them tomorrow, next week, or next month. As educators introspect about their past and present actions, they create concepts, hopes, and concerns to guide their future actions.

Schön writes about reflection on action and reflection in action. Reflection on action entails thinking critically about one's actions after they have had an effect (e.g., reflecting on one's achievements and failures with a particular lesson plan). Reflection in action entails thinking critically about one's actions in the midst of action

(e.g., reflecting on others' reactions to a lesson being taught). Schön's two types of reflection offer data, in the style of a personal action-research project, to plan for future changes. The art of personal and group reflection about past, present, and future events are integral processes of action research.

Stephen Kemmis and Jean McNiff

Stephen Kemmis and Jean McNiff, prominent proponents of action research in the 1980s, did most of their work in England. More recently, Kemmis has been facilitating school-based action research in Australia.

Stephen Kemmis

Taking cues from Schön, Stephen Kemmis's primary concern is in helping teachers critically reflect on their practice. He is more concerned with teacher introspection and teacher-teacher dialogue about practice than he is with the collection of systematic data, at least in the sense of using questionnaires, interviews, or documents. Kemmis's main research method is teachers making critical observations of their own practice (Kemmis and McTaggart 1988).

In *The Action Research Planner*, Kemmis and McTaggart (1988) delineate their self-reflective cycle—plan, act, observe, reflect, and plan, act, observe, reflect, etc. For an example of the Self-Reflective Cycle, see Figure 9.3.

Self-Reflective Cycle

A teacher realizes she is unhappy with student involvement in social studies (planning). Although she cannot change the prescribed curriculum, she can change how students work within the curriculum. She decides to use helping trios in social studies instruction. The teacher explains to students how helping trios work, and she forms students into trios (acting). Next, she listens in on a few trios to assess how they are going (observing). She is pleased with student energy and involvement, but she is

worried about too little student time on task (reflecting). The teacher decides to train students in how to use a structured interview within trios (planning). She carries out the training (acting). Then, she listens in on a few trios (observing). She likes what is happening in general (observing); however, she is concerned about four of her special-needs students who are not as highly involved as the other students. Thus, self-reflective cycles of personal action research continue.

Figure 9.3

Jean McNiff

Jean McNiff has extended Corey's, Lippitt's, and Kemmis's work in educational action research. In her book *Action Research: Principles and Practice*, McNiff (1988) describes the conceptual and historical bases of action research. She outlines how to start an action-research project and describes various data-collection techniques that are readily available to teachers.

McNiff urges educators to start small when they initiate their first action-research project. Teachers or administrators should start with their own personal, small-scale projects, or teachers and administrators should start with cooperative action research that is narrowly focused. McNiff stresses careful and deliberate planning, a realistic timetable for data collection, careful involvement of key stakeholders, and the establishment of clear and open communication with relevant administrators. Her book is replete with case studies of action research and includes tips on how to establish a collaborative network of action researchers.

William Foote Whyte

In 1991, William Foote Whyte edited *Participatory Action Research*, which presents case studies of action research in industry and in agriculture. Whyte's text does not give information about educational action research. Names like Dewey, Follett, Lewin, Miel, Corey, Lippitt, and Freire are notably absent from it, but Whyte's book adds to the understanding of the multiple roots of action research.

Whyte argues that action research in industry and in agriculture flows out of three intellectual streams in social science. Figure 9.4 explains these three intellectual streams.

Richard Sagor

Richard Sagor's *How to Conduct Collaborative Action Research*, published in 1992 by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), is a small but impressive text. It presents background information on why educa-

Whyte's Intellectual Streams

1. *The participatory research methods of social anthropologists and sociologists.* Participatory research methods, such as participant observation, have not been popular in psychology, where questionnaires, interviews, and documents often prevail. Whyte emphasizes observations made by participants themselves (e.g., group members serving as process observers, individual participants keeping journals about their own experiences, and nonparticipants watching action-research participants throughout different phases of action research).
2. *The participation of lower-echelon workers in organizational decision making.* Whyte refers to innovations aimed at democratizing the workplace, such as organizational development, total quality management, and quality of work-life programs. He argues that once workers participate with management in decision making, the idea of active cooperation between management and labor in a research process becomes legitimate. In that sense, Whyte views the rise of action research as depending on previous acceptance of worker participation in administrative matters.
3. *The concept that worker behavior depends on a combination of cultural and technological variables.* Whyte refers to the one-sided nature of Frederick Taylor's technocratic strategy of scientific management. Whyte argues that as scientific managers were influenced by the human relations movement to seek an integration between the human side and the technical side of the workplace, they could also recognize the benefit of engaging workers in action research to improve productivity. Thus, what has come to be called sociotechnical theory lends intellectual support to the idea of participatory action research.

Figure 9.4

tors need cooperative action research, what it is, and how to put it into a school or district.

Sagor offers five sequential steps, which are similar to the first four steps of responsive action research. Figure 9.5 highlights the five steps.

Another helpful aspect of Sagor's book is the practical information he gives about the three data sets mentioned in step 2.

Teacher Research

The historical trend from Dewey, Follett, and Lewin to Kemmis, McNiff, and Sagor is in the

direction of making action research more and more accessible to busy, overloaded teachers and administrators. The more recent researchers work as partners in the trenches. They write about practical, down-to-earth research methods that can readily be applied to real classrooms and schools. They also seek to establish educator networks so that colleagues can support one another in doing what has become known as teacher research.

Sagor's Five Sequential Steps

1. *A problem of great concern is defined and analyzed.* Borrowing from the creative work of Peter Holly and Gene Southworth (1989), Sagor describes how to use graphic flowcharts to depict interconnected parts of an educational problem.
2. *Data are collected about the problem.* Sagor argues that at least three data sets (existing data, methods to assess everyday life, and questioning methods) should be gathered for each problem. The first data set concerns records that already exist, such as student files, attendance data, teacher records about student behavior, and portfolios of student work. The second set, methods to assess everyday life, includes student and teacher journals, audio or video recordings of classroom activities, visitors' perceptions and reactions, systematic observations (both structured and unstructured), and photographs of classroom activity structures and of students in various school settings outside the classroom. The third set, questioning methods, includes individual and focus-group interviews, paper-and-pencil questionnaires (including sociometric inventories), and achievement tests.
3. *The data are analyzed for themes and patterns.* Sagor presents the idea of a data matrix as a useful device for organizing data and pinpointing themes.
4. *The results of the data analysis are reported to significant stakeholders.* Sagor gives helpful ideas on how to structure the report.
5. *A plan for action is prepared and implemented.* Sagor advocates using Lewin's Force-Field Analysis (see chapter 1) to develop action plans.

Figure 9.5